

VZCZCXRO0625
PP RUEHLMC
DE RUEHLP #0865 0891708
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 301708Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2995
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 6669
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 3992
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 7879
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 5133
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2357
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2472
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3400
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4513
RUEHQ/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5002
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 9583
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0239
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 000865

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/07/2017

TAGS: ECON PGOV PREL BL

SUBJECT: BOLIVIA SLIDES TOWARDS ELECTIONS?

REF: LA PAZ 795

Classified By: Ecopol Counselor Andrew Erickson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: With national elections generally expected to take place in late 2008 (reftel), there are rumors in the indigenous community that President Morales could choose Constituent Assembly President Silvia Lazarte as his running mate. As with the December 2005 and July 2006 elections, the Venezuelans are reportedly reviving their efforts to provide Bolivian identity documents to citizens who could not otherwise vote in upcoming elections, and who will presumably support Morales' Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party. To complement this effort and further expand his support base, Morales has also launched a campaign to lower the voting age from 18 to 16 years of age. While many Bolivians do not want electoral politics to interfere with the Constituent Assembly (which finishes its mandate August 6), the country is increasingly awash in pre-electoral maneuvering. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) With national elections generally expected to take place in late 2008 (reftel), there are rumors in the indigenous community that President Morales could choose Constituent Assembly Silvia Lazarte as his running mate. While Lazarte, like Morales, hails from Cochabamba, her gender and Quechua origin would bring some balance to the MAS ticket. Rumors of a Morales-Lazarte pairing have been circulating for several weeks.

¶3. (C) As with the December 2005 and July 2006 elections, the Venezuelans are reportedly reviving their efforts to provide Bolivian identity documents to citizens who could not otherwise vote in the upcoming elections, and who will presumably support Morales' Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party. Indigenous representatives in the traditional coca-growing Yungas area report that joint GOB/GOV efforts are currently concentrated there, where the rough terrain isolates many indigenous and Afro-Bolivians. Without identification documents, these Bolivian cannot vote, borrow money, or function as full members of society.

¶4. (SBU) To further expand his support base, Morales has also launched a campaign to lower the voting age from 18 to 16 years of age in the hopes that he could sway young Bolivians to vote for the MAS. Reaction to Morales' proposal has been overwhelmingly negative -- over 80 percent of Bolivians oppose the measure according to a March poll. Opposition may be strongest in indigenous communities, where there are clearly defined standards for when a young person assumes adulthood. Indigenous males are considered adults after they complete their compulsory military service (usually around age 18).

¶5. (C) Comment: While many Bolivians do not want electoral politics to interfere with the Constituent Assembly (which is scheduled to finish its mandate August 6), the country is increasingly awash in pre-electoral maneuvering. Morales' consideration of Lazarte as a running mate instead of Vice President Garcia Linera, particularly given her weak performance as president of the CA, shows that he understands that symbolism is more important to Bolivia's electorate than management. In any event, Morales continues to ride high in the polls, with a 65 percent approval rating despite a number of recent missteps. End comment.

GOLDBERG